

Winter 2004

# ARSENAL

A Magazine of Anarchist Strategy and Culture

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Winter 2004

#6

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## ARSENAL

a magazine of anarchist  
strategy and culture  
Issue Six, Winter 2004

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Special thanks to:  
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We welcome debate from  
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anarchist activists.  
Please write to us.

Of course we also  
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# ROUGH DRAFT

## ANARCHISTS CONFRONTING EMPIRE

*Whether the mask is labelled Fascism, Democracy, or Dictatorship of the Proletariat, our great adversary remains the Apparatus, the bureaucracy, the police, the military. Not the one facing us across the frontier or the battlelines, which is not so much our enemy as our brother's enemy, but the one that calls itself our protector and makes us its slaves. No matter what the circumstances, the worst betrayal will always be to subordinate ourselves to this Apparatus, and to trample underfoot, in its service, all human values in ourselves and in others.*

—Simone Weil, *Politics*, Spring 1945

*Obedience,  
Bane of all genius, virtue, freedom, truth,  
Makes slaves of men, and of the human frame,  
A mechanized automaton.*

—Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Queen Mab*

*"Patriotism in its simplest, clearest, and most indubitable meaning is nothing but an instrument for the attainment of the government's ambitious and mercenary aims, and a renunciation of human dignity, common sense, and conscience by the governed, and a slavish submission to those who hold power. That is what is really preached wherever patriotism is championed. Patriotism is slavery."*

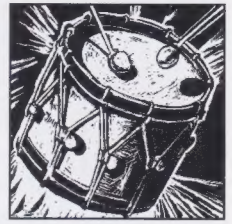
—Leo Tolstoy, *Christianity and Patriotism*

The past year has brought capitalist society's tendency towards crisis into unusually clear focus, with a government in the hands of the Christian Right; a war that threatens the entire Middle East; and a rapidly unraveling social contract that has increased inequality and put millions out of work. Anger over these issues is palpable, and anarchists need to figure out how to connect it with our own anger over global capital.

In this context, we should be careful that our efforts are headed in the right direction. Anarchists are a vital part of the

demonstrations against any US war, but it is far more important to build a broad resistance to capitalism and the state. A movement built on the basis of "peace" or "no war" is shortsighted and open to thoroughly reactionary politics. It invariably dissipates when the government declares the war to be over, and it will be limited tactically by "peaceful" resistance.

Anarchists shouldn't concede issues like war or labor conditions to reformists. The challenge is to address (and then discuss, decide and act on) these issues from



RESISTANCE





Turkish anarcho-football supporters against the war.\*

a revolutionary perspective. We need to keep sight of both the day-to-day reality and our ultimate goals. In Iraq, this means seeking out and supporting actions like those of the oil refinery workers who recently demanded the freedom to elect management from the shop floor, in the face of US occupying forces. Or it means expressing solidarity with soldiers accused of disobeying their superiors.

...oil refinery workers who recently demanded the freedom to elect management from the shop floor, in the face of US occupying forces who want to install their own appointed management.

In our own communities, it means many things, and starts with having conversations. Questions are being asked by our neighbors, by the person sitting next to us on the bus by the people who bag our groceries or work one cubicle over from us: Where are the weapons of mass destruction? Why are playgrounds being bombed? What about those contracts to 'rebuild Iraq'? The big, BIG answers anarchists need are: what is really going on? What is likely to happen next?

And, what the hell can be done about it?

It is a scary time to be without hope. Many people are afraid to move, afraid to change jobs (if they have one), afraid of the economic situation. Anarchist collectives, organizations and affinity groups with thoughtful plans have a chance to bridge the gaps between where we are and what we want.

In Arsenal No. 6, Carwell James discusses the importance of last year's anti-IMF demonstrations in overcoming the post-September 11 backlash—but also in what it unlearned from previous demonstrations. Jeff Shantz of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty discusses that organization's history, principles, and the place of direct actions in its long-term goals. Hopefully, these articles will spark the discussion needed to build a movement that can tackle the sophistication, depth and variety of the global capitalist system.

### Business

This is the first issue of *Arsenal* in over a year, and readers may wonder at the delay. Our editorial collective has undergone a number of changes, with old members leaving in order to pursue other goals. We wish them the best of luck, and hope the current issue does their past work justice. The new editorial collective is at work on issue number 7.

The *Arsenal* website has finally been updated. You will find items for discussion in the letters section. Look for an improved contributions, back issue availability, and an events page.

Correspondence will brought up



to date within a month or two. We apologize for the extended lapse.

*Arsenal* is available at \$4 for single issues, or \$14 for a subscription of four issues. Send cash, checks or money orders directly to the editorial collective. Institutions pay \$28 for a subscription in the U.S. Contact us for wholesale or overseas prices. *Arsenal* magazine is available in Chicago at Earwax, Reckless Records, New World Resource Center, Quimbys, Heartland Cafe and the Autonomous Zone. Tree of Knowledge Press, AK Press and others distribute *Arsenal* wholesale and/or retail. Look for links on the *Arsenal* website.

If you will be in Chicago on January 15, 2004 we will see you at the Conflict show. Otherwise we can catch up with you at the Bay Area Anarchist Bookfair on March 13, or on the pitch at the Anarchist Football (as in soccer) tournament.

¡Salud!

\*(Supporters of) Besiktas Football Club of Istanbul, who went on to win the Turkish Championship. Nice to be with the winning side.



Greek anti-war flyer

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# ARSENAL

A Magazine of Anarchist Strategy and Culture





# GROWING THROUGH DARING

## FORGETTING THROUGH FEAR



photo: Emily Foreman

by Carwell James

### Celebration and Criticism of the WEF Protests in New York

January 2002's protests against the World Economic Forum in New York marked the return to large-scale, creative confrontation with the forces of capitalist globalization in the United States. The previous six months had seared two images into the minds of the movement: the point-blank shooting and crushing of G8 protester Carlo Giuliani in Genoa; and the stunning, murderous crash of two planes into the World Trade Center in lower Manhattan. September 11th concerned activists in New York for a number of reasons: the fear of terrorist attack on the very institutions we sought to change with hopeful, creative means; police repression

given new strength by the a resurgent chauvinism; and the fear that the global destruction of corporate rule would seem incomprehensible to a city still shaken by its own vulnerability. The WEF was hoping to capitalize on these fears by moving the meetings from Davos, Switzerland to New York in a questionable "show of solidarity." In the eyes of the powerful midtown Manhattan was now a safer place than an Alpine resort.

### New Possibilities

For those of us working for radical social change, the WEF protest represented not just a return to the barricades, but a number of possibilities for the movement. First, a protest against corporate globalization gained real momentum in the wake of September 11th—something that isn't just a matter of attendance.



More importantly, the rush to New York City came off without a well-funded push by American non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Few NGOs made large public commitments to the week, with many staying away or focusing on policy issues and staying off the streets instead. Those that did commit were largely Southern NGOs, like the Third World Network, who set the tone at the Public Eye on Davos event and on Pacifica's WBAI, which became the unofficial radio station of the protests.

With the well-resourced NGOs backing off (many of them with plane tickets to the World Social Forum in hand), the radicals, students and youth moved into leadership. Their organizing put anarchism and anti-capitalism center stage, spearheaded by the anarchist-leaning Another World is Possible (AWIP) coalition and the Anti-Capitalist Convergence. The message reverberated from Patrick Reinsborough's keynote speech at the student conference (comparing capitalism to the logic of the cancer cell, and tying it to global environmental collapse) to the simplest slogans confronting the WEF ("Bad capitalist, no martini"). Anarchist puppeteers framed the Saturday and Monday demonstrations; the *Village Voice* ran a cover story on the rise of anarchism within the movement; and even the *New York Times* offered its readers a capsule summary of anarchist politics.

The student presence in New York was also radicalized. The three-day conference at Columbia University was largely organized by anti-capitalists and offered a broad systemic critique addressing scores of issues

and communities. Regional student organizing in New England often took an anarchist viewpoint and prepared students for participation in the ACC.

The ACC itself moved beyond the tactical focus adopted by past Black and Revolutionary Anti-Capitalist blocs, to a much broader organizing effort; training and envisioning an ongoing organizing role for the Convergence. Despite its failure to devise a complete scenario for the massive Saturday rally, the spokescouncil for the mobilization provided a powerful forum for coordination. It was the smoothest consensus process I've seen at its scale. Its ethic of solidarity with those most vulnerable to arrest and the readiness to flood Grand Central Station with a massive spiral dance are just two of its successes.

Finally, the solidarity offered by this mobilization to struggles overseas turned a corner for the American movement. Rather than vague conceptions like "the Global South" or "the poor", we were rallying for specific people and struggles. Argentina's December revolt inspired many shows of solidarity—the first success in many opportunities for an anti-World Bank/IMF national uprising to take center stage in a U.S. protest. Meanwhile, students at Columbia and the grassroots group SUSTAIN: Stop U.S. Tax Aid to Israel Now put a spotlight on the struggle of Palestinians for freedom. The spirit of the uprising in Argentina, in Palestine, in North America was invoked on the streets: "Palestina. Argentina. Viva, viva intifada."



## Lessons Lost

The New York mobilization demonstrated that the movement against capitalist globalization could bounce back and maintain its creative radicalism. But it also showed that the movement's ability to learn and adapt is not as strong as many of us had hoped. Since Seattle, a series of critiques have helped define the agenda of the movement: Betita Martinez's and Colin Rajah's "Where Was the Color...?" articles on the persistence of racialized power structures, even in the euphoric togetherness of N30 and A16, sparked movement-wide discussions on racism and culture. The wide range of organizers in the Philadelphia and Los Angeles mobilizations broadened the agenda to issues of poverty in the United States, the criminal injustice system, education and queer liberation. The summer 2001 gathering of the National Organizers' Alliance acted as an encounter between traditional community organizers and the mobilization-focused activists confronting globalization. The D.C. mobilization planned for September focused on local issues such as homelessness and hospital privatization.

For some of us, the ability of criticisms to generate real change on these and other issues inside the movement felt as powerful and liberating as seeing street blockades throw off the agenda of the WTO. The movement's ability to grow and learn made it hopeful, made it alive, made it ours, finally. How bitter, then, was our disappointment at seeing lessons we thought had been learned disappear in the rush to respond to the World Economic Forum.

Most fundamentally, the anti-WEF mobilization was built from the institution (the WEF) down, rather than from the community up. For the most part, community struggles did not set the agenda of the protests. We were arguing against WEF propaganda ("Corporations come together to solve the world's problems") and chasing the headlines around Enron and Argentina. The net result was that fewer New Yorkers were involved and the protesters had comparatively little interaction with people in the city. People who have massed by the thousands against police brutality and queer bashing, and for workers' rights, access to education, and community gardens did not see these issues on the agenda of street protests. Labor organizers, who were denied a march permit, limited their outreach efforts and didn't invite their supporters to participate in the rest of the weekend. This is all unfortunate because New York is one of the strongest North American cities in terms of local struggles. It is truly a world city with exile communities that play an important role in cross-border campaigns. It is not just an island of corporate skyscraper fortresses, but a landscape of the poor and surviving, the privileged and disillusioned, of communities creating new realities. To walk across the city is to encounter the sites of generations striving for liberation, the places of inspiration for tens of thousands of artists envisioning a new world, the ground upon which waves of sacrifice have been made in the hope of social change.

We seemed to revert to old ways in dealing with the police, too.





photo: Emily Foreman

As in Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Quebec, and other protests since Seattle, police deployment against the demonstrators was massive and well-publicized. Unlike L.A. and Philadelphia, where recent episodes of police brutality (the Ramparts scandal and a widely reported brutal beating just weeks before the RNC) dominated perceptions of the police, the New York Police had a heroic image coming out of 9/11.

Press-savvy activists played down confrontation with police, and used a "Don't attack us, we're just protesting" message. The history of police abuse in New York City seemed forgotten: "Quality of life" crackdowns on the poor, police shootings of black immigrants, mass searches of tens of thousands of young men of color, the police riot at the Matthew Shepherd memorial march, and the baton-enforced closure of the "Million" Youth March in Harlem were all absent milestones of cruelty. Also

forgotten was a link forged between the anti-corporate-globalization movement and the communities targeted by, and organizing against, the police. Between Seattle and Los Angeles, the movement seemed to learn a lot. We had gone from a handful of self-appointed "leaders" saying arrest the rioters, not the protesters to standing with the neighborhoods at the center of the 1992 riots against police domination. We learned that the police act as a line of social control; that policing dissent is akin to policing race or queerness or cultural conformity; that the people profiled, beaten and jailed everyday by the police are often allies of—not threats to—the movement. We learned this in convergence centers, on the streets, and in jail. And we worked together, energized by the power of new-found solidarity.

But in New York, seeing ourselves through the eyes of the media, we forgot the lessons we had learned. The streets around the





photo: Emily Foreman

Waldorf-Astoria were ground zero for the "social cleansing" of the homeless by the Grand Central Partnership, an experiment in corporate policing that was spread across Manhattan. The mobilization had nothing to say about this. Haitian immigrant Georgy Louisgene was shot in January by the NYPD, and Haitian community of Brooklyn rallied the week of the convergence, but fewer than a dozen people from the convergence even attended his funeral. And the night of the last WEF demonstration there was a candlelight vigil for the third anniversary of the NYPD murder of Amadou Diallo. I found out about it by the television news. Perhaps strengthened by the "Let's come together as one" message post 9/11, the past emphasis on oppressed groups defining their own liberation seemed absent. No large protest event focused on racism,

sexism, homophobia, or adult privilege. The defining role of anti-oppression trainings, caucuses, and action to transform ourselves (as well as the powerful) is one of the things that makes our movement radical. We ought to strengthen this, and put it at the center of every mobilization.

Perhaps some other shortcomings of the WEF protests can be explained by the rushed nature of the preparations. But this should only remind us of the need to make building from communities out, standing with those most targeted by the state, and dismantling systems of oppression into our goals instead of things to be remembered with each new effort. When we recover these lessons and build on our strengths, we can have the power to take back our world from its corporate masters.



## Afterward

A year and a half after the WEF protests the movement for radical social change in North America has returned in greater numbers. At its center is a word that was on too few lips in January 2002: "war". For over a year, the largest focus of opposition has been on countering new invasions in Palestine and Iraq. And even as other priorities rise, we activists have learned that we cannot separate the financial or domestic aspects of empire from its military edge.

It wasn't until August 2002 that the movement really overcame its post-9/11 quiet (though there were impressive mass demonstrations in solidarity with Palestinians in April). Then, ten thousand protesters in Portland, Oregon, defended forests and Iraq in a mass show of resistance to a visiting George W. Bush. By the end of the rebel anti-war commemoration of the 9/11 anniversary, the national sense of mourning and the suffocating quiet that accompanied it were at an end.

Confronting the war meant nationalizing the scope of our protest actions and intense local organizing. Anarchists and anti-globalization activists were a key part of the anti-war wave that swept over 2,400 cities and crested in a global weekend of protest in mid-February 2003. That weekend saw hundreds of thousands back in the streets of New York, many defying an official ban and police repression in scores of feeder marches. The week of March 15 saw mass actions in dozens of cities and a successful financial district shut down in San Francisco (and

Barcelona). The spokescouncils that were once reserved for short-term mass actions are now ongoing efforts in San Francisco, New York and Chicago. Some of the lessons lost in our rushed WEF efforts have now come back to us with a vengeance in a focus on "the war at home" and renewed solidarity on issues from environmental justice and immigration to union-busting and education.

The anarchist presence is, as always, everywhere in these movements—from organizing spokescouncils and direct action trainings to seeking out local allies. But anarchist visions for a new society are not as central as they were in confronting capitalist globalization. The loudest anarchist voice has been on the edges of demonstrations, in radical breakaway and feeder marches sometimes mixed with black (and pink) block tactics. At the same time, our community's energy has flowed into new collectives and projects, and has radicalized thousands raising the bar for the next wave of visible actions.



# ASK A FALLEN COMRADE

Dear Prince Kropotkin:

The last time I hung out with my boyfriend I coulda killed him. I would have tried except for the guards and the bullet-proof glass. I got so mad when he was telling me through the intercom phone all about his fancy new "job"—it's like he actually likes it!

What new job? I said. You're in prison, that's your job. And he said no, like they give them other jobs in there sometimes if they're lucky and on good behavior. And I said, lucky? Luck doesn't seem to be your strong suit. And he said, when you say things like that, I feel like that really lowers my self-esteem. Then I said, hey, doesn't it bother you that not only does the State have you locked up, but the State is also forcing you to labor with no pretense of compensation, much less of movement toward collective ownership of the means of production? So he said, it beats picking my ass in a cell all day, I get three hots and a cot and seventeen cents an hour, and besides since I'm on dry cleaning team I get to hang out with women's underwear again.

So I said, dry cleaning team! No way! Then visiting half-hour was over and the fascist guards made him hang up before I could say, hey jerk, the last thing I want the father of my future children to be frolicking around in is great big clouds of Perchloroethylene. Why don't you just go zap your balls with gamma rays?

I think prison has changed him, Prince. The boyfriend I once knew would never be a slave or

allow the government to mutate our future children. Do you think he'll bounce back when he's out (in three-to-six) or should I go ahead and dump him now?

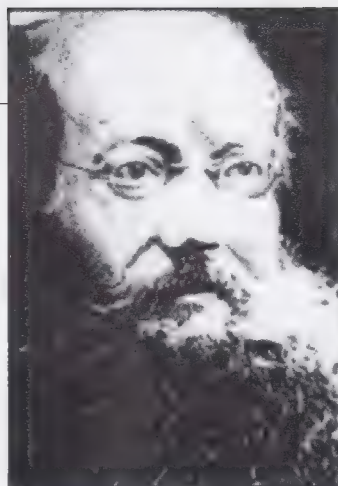
Gas-Ex

Dear G.E.

Whatever else may be, you can be sure that prison has changed your boyfriend. Prisons kill all will and force of character in man. They enclose within their walls more vices than are met with on any other spot of the globe. If prison has stripped your boyfriend of his former ideals and replaced them with new inventiveness for crime, he is only one of many so remunerated.

Before I was a prisoner myself, first in Russia then in France, I still believed that prisons could be reformatories, and that the privation of liberty is compatible with moral amelioration. I was young. The working conditions you describe prove that society's true intention regarding prisoners will always be revenge. In my day, death and disease were assured through prisons' freezing temperatures and inadequate food, which seem to have been ameliorated by "three hots and a cot." Now chemical warfare may do the same job.

As for working directly at the command of and for the benefit of the State, I can't get too worked up about it. Doesn't the State prevent us all, prisoner or not, from using our labor power without selling it to someone? Even wagedworkers remain the slave or the subordinate of the one to whom they are forced to



Peter Kropotkin

sell labor, be the buyer a private individual or the State.

As a former prisoner I can tell you, enforced idleness nearly made me crazy. Surely, it is less degrading for the convict to be employed in useful work than in "picking his ass." Idlers do not make history: they suffer it!

With that in mind, I encourage you to reject idleness yourself and implement a plan for his escape. First try for a transfer to the hospital wing where security is less tight. Then, on the successful night, be sure to celebrate freedom in the most expensive restaurant in town. Trust me, the "authorities" will never look for you there.

Good luck.

Prince Peter Kropotkin.



# ANARCHY IN REHERSAL AND IN PRACTICE

## THEATER OOBLECK METHOD & STYLE

by Vic Speedwell

Theater Oobleck is an influential company in both off-loop theater and the anarchist community in Chicago. Adventurous, smart, sometimes giddy, often scandalous and pretty darn political. This group specializes in spare, rough-around-the-edges productions on makeshift stages. Every cast and crew member is a decision-maker. Not one single show in the group's twenty year history has had a director. Oobleck has learned organizing the hard way. Their struggle with anti-authoritarian methods is instructive to anarchists.

### Primordial Ooze: Origins Of Oobleck

Like so many of Chicago's best and brightest, Oobleck started out in the Old Country (Ann Arbor, Michigan). Originally named Streetlight Theater, many of the members were part of consensus-based "left" political organizations. They brought meetings from political groups into rehearsals and productions. The theater company "left" Michigan for Chicago and became Oobleck.

### Decisions, Decisions

Many anarchists and other anti-authoritarians employ a special methodology in having meetings. But process can discourage participation. Go-arounds, testing, blocking



An Immense World of Delight flyer, illustration by Dave Buchen

and techniques used to assure fairness for lengthy and frustrating discussions. Refrains have developed: "For a world without meetings..." and "There are a million bad meetings between now and the revolution." Even children of anarchists have picked up on the roles and have been heard to say, "Let's play meeting." Some groups have allowed an open meeting style to increase

## ANARCHY IN REHEARSAL...

unreliable elements and drive down competence.

## Blame Dave Buchen

These problems apply to an occasional Oobleck meeting. But in general, their application of consensus process is comparatively smooth. It is a small group that meets about a very specific project with a firm deadline. Everyone at the meeting is directly involved in production and has specific responsibilities for which they receive guidance from at least one other person in the group.

Oobleck originally functioned as a fairly tight ensemble, with the same fifteen people exchanging jobs in every show—this time a writer and actor, next time the costume designer and actor, and the next time after that a stage hand, poster designer and actor. Everything worked with effort and a growing pool of resources and skills.

The application of consensus decision making worked so well that when the Autonomous Zone, an anarchist center and collective in Chicago, was forming in 1993, Oobleckian, Dave Buchen argued in favor of adopting consensus process. "One of our first discussions was on decision making and someone said 'Okay, let's vote on that,' and I made an impassioned speech and used the theater as an example, and the group agreed, and we adopted consensus process. Ironically, in a specifically anarchist setting, it never really worked."

The mechanics of a political group and a theater company are vastly different. Or are they? The purpose of the Autonomous Zone doesn't have a specific start and

strike, so to speak. The purpose is a list. Unity is a continuum. But at Oobleck, says Buchen "No one has to wonder what our purpose is, what we are doing... Everyone is working to make a good play. We had a couple of retreats to figure out what we are between the shows and they were so miserable—never again! When there is a play to put on, we do a play. There are pieces that have to be put together. Meetings are more about how the pieces get made than how can they fit. They have to fit. We are not really much of a group in between shows."

The Oobleck experience is instructive: What are all of these people doing in meetings if they are not working on a common production or ends? Shouldn't the A-Zone and other collectives have as part of their goal to always produce something?

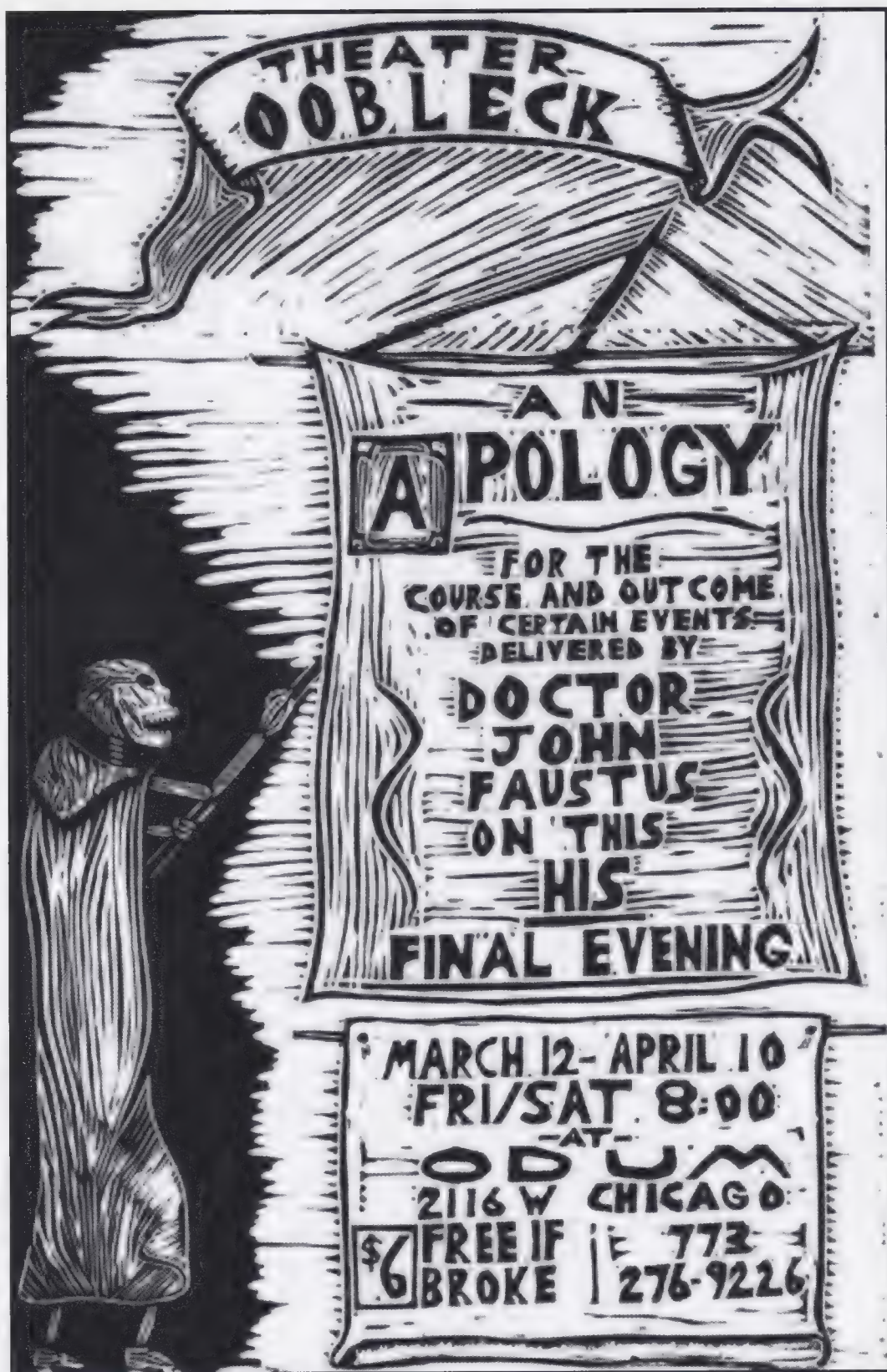
## We All Agree To That

For anarchism to be a concept that people take into their lives, it can't just be something you see on CNN or on a flyer at a demonstration. Anarchism has to be visible and experienced in many arenas—work, theater, sport, community center, papers. It has to be broad, it has to touch many aspects of people's lives in order to successfully undermine the status quo.

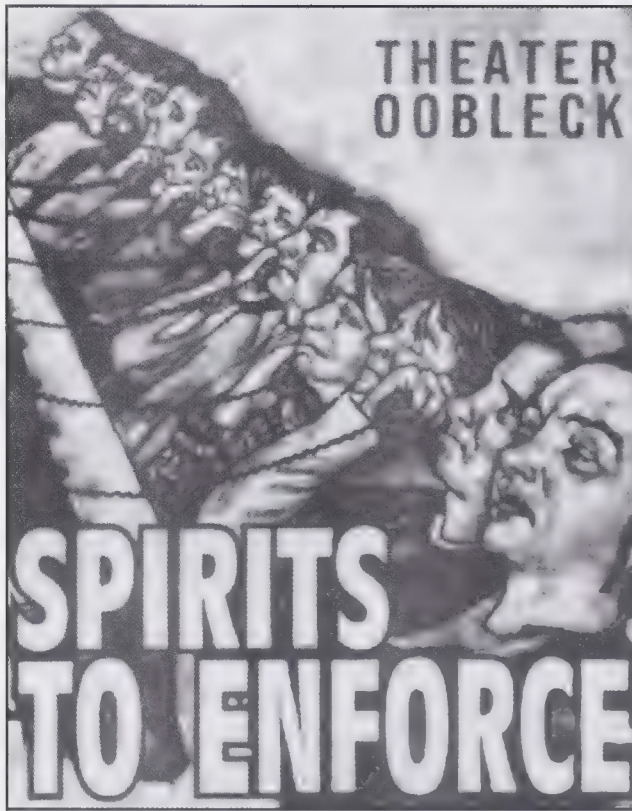
For Dave this aspect of anarchism has been most consistently attainable in plays. "In many ways I feel less connected to anarchism and more connected to theater. We're the anarchist mole—infiltrating. Nice to demonstrate that possibility."

Oobleck is pretty successful at infiltration and recruitment. The group was invited to be the





An Apology... promotional poster, illustration by Dave Buchen



Spirits to Enforce promotional flyer, illustration by Friese Undine

Theater in Residence at Columbia College located in the South Loop of downtown Chicago for one semester in 2000. They gave an assignment to the student directors: write and perform a play using one historical character, one member of your family and one wild card character. Of the six participants in the program, two are now Oobleckers.

### **The 3 L's—Longevity, Leadership, Lessons**

**What I learned from Oobleck, Dave and even the A-Zone, but mostly Oobleck**

According to Oobleck: a playwright creates a play and everyone is in it. That person/role changes from show to show. The process of making changes,

developing characters, and so forth, trains the next playwright. Understand that not everyone can or wants to write an entire play, but that everyone involved in Oobleck should write—modify their lines, write scenes, write for practice. Oobleck has put on a lot of 10 minute and one act plays. From their work in Michigan to the present, there have been more than fifty productions and more than 100 plays (including shorts).

**Lesson:** Train, practice, experiment. Become skilled. Work to make it all work.

According to Oobleck: Have high expectations, demand a high degree of responsibility. If someone doesn't have a role, whether technical, musical or performance, what are they doing at the meeting or making a decision?

**Lesson:** Get busy or get out.

According to Oobleck: "Some people say there is no director, some people say that everyone is a director. When something has to get done, someone takes the lead for a while. When we have to block two scenes and it's late and everyone is lazy, someone has to say, "All right, let's get going on this now!" And everyone knows that when you need a joke, consult Danny Thompson."

**Lesson:** Have both initiative and a sense of humor. Organize.

According to Oobleck: There is very little in the way of factions or minority/majority opinions in their group. When there are factions, they are fluid—involving different people from situation to situation. Splits are rare. All can give notes but the actor's prerogative is always trump. The person most directly affected by a decision has



the final say.

Lesson: Use internal conflict to solve problems. Use a form of decision making based on participation and responsibility. Allow no coasting.

According to Oobleck: For some reason, more people want to go to a play than to an anarchist meeting. Going to a play is safe, even if it isn't taking place in a traditional theater environment or following a traditional theater formula. The play can discuss issues in an interesting and confrontational way. The actors get to expand ideas, express many viewpoints, ridicule society and more.

Lesson: Make propaganda. Get an audience. Make that audience bigger and more supportive of less-than-safe, radical and militant modus operandi. Recruit.

According to Oobleck: "We modify metaphors. Make them and the associations a little less safe. This is propaganda. I don't mean to define propaganda as this method but rather to say our work fits into the concept of propaganda as it molds and manipulates what is perceived of as truth for a direct political purpose." Anarchist favorites produced by Oobleck include *Antistasia*, where Prince Peter Kropotkin is working as a train conductor and meets a peasant who

thought she was a princess. and *Anywhere Else Than Here Today*, with ant society promoted as an ideal. Recently Oobleck put on *Known Unknowns* where an Unknown Unknown successfully outwitted agents for a Homeland Security agency (see Review on page 30). *Innocence and Other Vices* tackled some unusual politics and family relations in Puerto Rico. In another play, *Pinochet, A Carnival*, Reagan and Thatcher nursed at the same tit. Next up is a play called *Spirits to Enforce* about twelve super heroes working as telemarketers. On a distant back burner is a version of *Jack and the Bean Stalk* by Charles Ludlam that has Jack selling the cow to a vegan and getting soybeans in exchange. Ludlam said, "You are a mockery of your own ideals. If not, you've set your ideals too low."

Lesson: Make a lot with a little. Be clever. Be very clever.

# OUBLECK MANIFESTO (Highly Condensed)

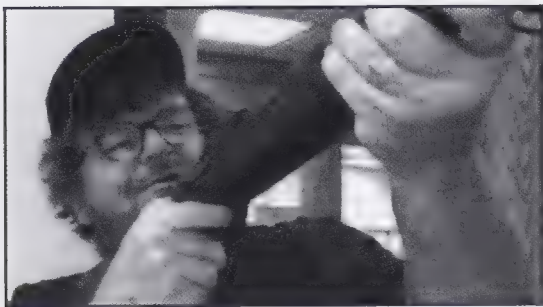
by Manny Festo

- No Director! No Director! No Director!
- Our aim is to empower ourselves as individuals and as a collective.
- But how does anything get decided? Through near-endless, often-ugly, makes-you-know-you're-alive argument, debate, discussion.
- Like Bread & Puppet, we believe in a theater that is created cheap and is cheap to see. Our pricing policy runs from \$4 to \$7 suggested donation, more if you've got it, free if you're broke. Why keep people out of the theater?
- People who come to our shows tend to say that they are characterized by an Energy. The word "Gonzo" has been used, but, luckily, not for a while. Many of us had Brechtian training with the Brecht Company of Ann Arbor. We were all greatly influenced by "The Mary Tyler Moore Show." Lisa Black has extensive Grotowski training and she influenced the rest of us a lot when she joined. Result: Often, and not unhappily, different styles exist concurrently on the stage. Naturalism, commedia, you name it.

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For the complete Manifesto and an out-of-date production history visit  
[www.geocities.com/theateroobleck/soapbox.html](http://www.geocities.com/theateroobleck/soapbox.html)

# BOWLING FOR COLUMBINE



by Michael Staudenmaier

Filmmaker Michael Moore is one of the few people who can get millions of daytime television viewers to watch a brutally funny radical cartoon about the history of white supremacy in the United States, including blunt references to genocide, slavery, and the Klan. This cartoon, which is the most politically sophisticated part of his new film, *Bowling for Columbine*, was aired on the Oprah Winfrey show a few weeks after the film opened. Winfrey even allowed a glowing blurb to be used in newspaper ads for the film.

The secret to Moore's popular success, as usual, is his acerbic combination of gallows humor and left-liberal populism, made all the more marketable by his crossover appeal as a product of the white working class who connects politically with the white liberal middle class. The best thing about *Bowling for Columbine* is the way in which it directly challenges the anti-racist pretensions of white liberals by dissecting the pervasive presence of white supremacy in modern life. The worst thing about the film is the way in which it reinforces the equally dangerous pretensions of white liberals that gun control is somehow a panacea for white supremacy.

## The Good Stuff

Moore has always been a challenging filmmaker with a solid sense of class

divisions and class struggle in North America. Unfortunately, he has traditionally avoided tackling the issue of racism, with the partial exception of his participation in the filming of the documentary *Blood in the Face*, about fascist movements in North America. *Bowling for Columbine* is a refreshing change of pace from the racial blind spot that afflicted *Roger and Me* and *The Big One*. Examples of Moore's interest in challenging racism abound, from the cartoon mentioned above, to a hilarious montage of TV news clips about Africanized Killer Bees. Moore intentionally highlights the large and small, obvious and subtle, ways that white supremacy infects our everyday lives.

Consider, for example, the recurring theme of slavery. The cartoon suggests strongly that lingering fear of slave revolts is the root psychological cause of gun obsessions, at least among right-wing NRA types. Moore repeatedly notes that Canada, which resembles the US quite closely in many ways, has a higher rate of gun ownership per capita, but a far lower rate of shooting deaths annually. The difference? He never exactly says it, but Moore implies the historically brief and limited presence of slavery in Canada may have something to do with it. This is obviously a flawed theory (and doesn't seem to be one that Moore is really attached to), but it does encourage white liberals to rethink their own equally flawed theories.

While simplistic in this context, Moore's willingness to confront the lasting legacy of slavery is important. At the very least, it challenges the widespread notion that slavery is mere history without any lasting consequences continuing to this day. As a liberal, Moore can't quite bring himself to connect the origins of chattel slavery and the origins of modern capitalism, although he

**Bowling for Columbine**



does offer some solid analysis of the economic context of gun violence, offering his hometown of Flint, Michigan as a microcosm of the problems. Moore's racial politics may be mediocre, but he opens the door for others to move beyond the limits of liberalism.

## The Bad Stuff

I've speculated for years that the NRA is secretly funded by liberals who want gun advocates to seem as stupid as possible. And it's certainly true that lots of people with at least mildly interesting politics (including Moore himself) are happy gun owners. So when Moore said in an interview that his first impulse after the Columbine school shooting in 1999 was to run against Charleton Heston for president of the NRA; I thought this was a great idea. Now, having seen *Bowling for Columbine*, I'm not so sure.

As is his habit, Moore deliberately reduces the arguments of his opponents to their most shallow form. He makes Michigan Militia members sound like I've wingnuts; we're expected to ask ourselves whether they should even have access to guns. He harasses Heston, not inappropriately but also without much point. Yeah, we know Heston is an idiot, so what?

The most frustrating thing is that Moore is asking the right questions, but refuses to consider alternative answers. The Canadian example is most telling here: Canada has more guns and less shooting deaths, so why must gun control be the answer? Moore may be a card-carrying member of the NRA, but his obsession with gun control leaves me wondering why. There's plenty in *Bowling for*

*Columbine* that challenges liberal gun-control orthodoxy, so again viewers can make what they want out of the movie. A clip of Chris Rock's stand up routine includes a hilarious mock argument for making bullets outrageously expensive. This can be construed as an implicit criticism of the notion that legal restrictions on access to guns are a meaningful solution to gun violence. The repeated jabs at US militarism serve the same purpose. So long as North American culture is built on war and imperialism, gun violence is a given, no matter the level of gun control.

The movie was perhaps made too late to include reference to the number of wives and girlfriends killed by servicemen returning from Afghanistan last year, with more to come as veterans return from the Second Gulf War. Regardless, it's telling that Moore fails to focus on police shootings, or other "official" gun violence inside the US. In Chicago, for instance, an effort to prohibit gun ownership by individuals convicted of domestic violence was derailed partly because too many cops wouldn't have been able to carry guns. The liberal position on gun control is incompatible with these sorts of facts because no liberal, including Moore, will ever suggest taking guns away from cops.

## Conclusion

Moore is talented, no doubt about it. *Bowling for Columbine* is a movie very much worth seeing. It's fast-paced and funny enough to be entertaining, but the politics are so omni-present that analysis doesn't take a back seat to laughs. Unfortunately, Moore himself seems incapable of doing much of the needed

critical thinking on the issues at hand, so viewers will have to do it themselves.

How would an anarchist portrayal of these same themes differ, apart from the likely failure of such a film to gain a fraction of the distribution or notoriety of *Bowling for Columbine*? As we've learned over the years at the Chicago Anarchist Film Festival, film and video can be powerful tools for drawing less radicalized people toward anarchism. Anarchists are far more likely to make documentaries than we are to make non-documentary films, and at least some anarchists are pretty good at it.

An ideal anarchist documentary on gun culture would be just as funny but far more clear about the root political considerations at play, from white supremacy and the hypocrisy of gun control, to psychology and the state's monopoly on violence. Keep the obviously self-incriminating interview with the missile manufacturer; ditch Moore's self-serving and manipulative interviews with victims of gun violence. Add more about the flaws of gun control advocates, and balance the brief history of US imperial violence in the twentieth century with a comparable history of revolutionary violence by oppressed and marginalized people over that same time period.

*Bowling for Columbine* exists, despite its flaws. Anarchists will likely find it entertaining if not always as educational as it pretends to be. More importantly, it offers an opportunity to challenge some unexamined notions held by lots of people in North America, including Moore himself.

# THE WRETCHED OF THE RAILS

BY JEAN-BERNARD POUY



## Part II

by Jean-Bernard Pouy

A translation of *Plein Tarif*  
(Paris: Mille et Une Nuits, 1994)

by Jean-Philippe Gury, Carloyn Gates,  
and Robert Helms

### Chapter 5

The nice weather returned  
in the shape of a wandering

high-pressure system, ahead of its summer schedule. The social workers tried, at first gently, to evict the stationary travellers using persuasion and dangling various carrots in front of them. With the exception of a few celebrity tramps who returned without balking to the scenes of the silent feast (the haughty solitude in which these flowers will bloom at all costs), most of "the relocated," against all expectations, formed an unremovable block. It was out of the question for this railroad squat, given to them with one hand, to be taken away by the other. Below the surface there was some fight, some bitching of striking rudeness, and even some actual distress-calls. One guy died of natural causes, his liver scratching to get out; two others had to be hospitalized as emergency cases. But that was all.

The numerous dogs staying with all these paupers had bitten into a few shins and were barking as loudly as the dobermans who were guarding the small homes of their owners, behind the apartment towers a bit farther away. The press got involved, and viewed from, say Limoges, the scene looked almost Somalian. The henchman of the SNCF (re-christened *Sur Neuf Cinq Fascistes* by the paper *Liberación*, meaning "five out of nine are fascists") manhandled a few people, indulged in a few brutalities, and got called, because of their predictable malfeasance, vigilantes, Vichy cops, and "Drancystis;"<sup>4</sup> and



finally, on the evening of March twenty-second,<sup>5</sup> the henchmen took a serious beating in an encounter with some eager young anarchists who had rushed over to provide security for the train-dwellers.

Nobody had really planned that. The red squads were not what they used to be, being too busy infiltrating the Trotskyists, who in turn were infiltrating everybody, so they had not seen the sudden mobilization of young anarchists, who were just waiting for this sort of chance to play cops and robbers: the Austerlitz sorting yard as Parisian battlefield.

The affair became bluntly ideological, and then small groups of every kind turned up, all at once, finding a second youth. But also, snickering, the anarchist galaxy was more than happy to show the re-appearing Leninists that they were armed to the teeth with axe handles, slingshots, and Molotov cocktails. A Black Revolutionary Guard for the hungry, it was consciously committed to defend the trains, and not to re-live Kronstadt or Barcelona. The closet-commies were accused of train-hopping (ha ha ha), but they contented themselves to circulating leaflets and petitions, and timidly attempting to recruit new activists. The political big shots didn't even show up. The Right eats at Maxim's, not the soup kitchen; the Left eats caviar, not Campbell's Pork & Beans. The "fourth world" is just too "fifth of Night Train."

Everyone in this little world coexisted. Inside, in the cars, a complex humanity had found its niche. Outside, the political and social activists were protecting

what they considered a victory in the class war.

During that time, members of the Parliament from every party made strong, dramatic speeches when the SNCF asked the Minister of the Interior, with a heavy heart, to help them clear out the flea-bags. And they had to act quickly: in the field, their opponents were rapidly reinforcing and getting organized. They had to avoid the recurrence of scandalous episodes like when they forcibly evacuated Berber immigrants from the Sonacotra hostels: the burnoose against the bulldozer. It wasn't good for the image of France, the land of welcome, a nation trying to fight against discrimination, a society reputedly rich and responsible. The high-ranking SNCF administrator who first had the idea of the "trains of life" (once generous but now cumbersome and almost unmanageable) had been transferred to Marseille. He had his work cut out for him down there.

I never saw Uncle like that before. He was almost enjoying a social life again. He was becoming less personal and had met people like himself, something he didn't think was possible anymore. However, inside this paradoxical village, some discriminations had started to appear. The unemployed and homeless had created an internal selection process, little by little, first by screaming matches, then by smacks up-side the head. They think of themselves as being on a sinking ship, but not voluntarily. They managed to eliminate slowly from the cars anyone who didn't look the way they did...

At the end of March, there was a territorial partition, not very different, I have to admit, than

what is seen anywhere else. Uncle, and people like him, the old-fashioned tramps, the stinkiest and loudest ones, the sickest also, the ones who knew almost genetically how to avoid rides in the squad cars, had regrouped in the last train, the one at the back, the one least exposed to view, as if the ones who had put them there wanted to give the world a good impression of their village. Even if the geraniums were conspicuously absent from the windows, there was no way you could leave the dirtiest people on display. It was a question of facade.

There were two trains where people of color had wound up, by no accident, even if the others were saying that it was they who had seceded. The leftists had tried to make them respect the diversity, the integration, the mingling of races, but they broke their own morale in the attempt. Ghettos inside ghettos, a tale within a tale.

Some young runaways had tried to find lodging and meals in the more respectable cars, but were thrown out: they were told, go swipe what's available from your bourgeois parents and redistribute all of it here. A crypto-commie had said that this was a class reaction of good omen.

The neo-fascists conducted a raid one night. These cretins had succeeded in making a "holy alliance" between themselves, but they had brought everyone in the trains back together as one. The brawl had been quick and brutal, the men had not held their ground, but the dogs quickly made the difference. The

distinctive green hunting jackets had left in red shreds.

The state couldn't take it anymore. France couldn't brag about a little Bogot. It jarred. All that became dangerous, out of control. The lack of security was on everyone's lips. Only drugs were missing from this meeting of evil deeds. Too expensive. The poverty train was becoming a more and more unbearable provocation. But everything remained more or less at the level of big words and little sorrows.

## Chapter 6

On April 2, there was a death. A quarrel, a problem of a seat, or of stolen bottles, we will never know: a story of drunkenness and misfortune. Some knives appeared and a guy was stabbed to death. Before the ambulance arrived, the green vinyl of the seat had a change of color. The paramedics and the cops arrived later, and everything was quickly settled: the murderer didn't even hide himself, sleeping it off, stretched out in the aisle, his head resting against some dead Kronenbourgs. The TV channels, like buzzing shit-flies, followed the cops to the stench, looking for the best turd to film.

Among the anarchist buddies, we knew it was the signal for the end. The Media finally had enough to make the mob vomit, to calm the guilty feelings and to prepare the ground. Since everything had become uncontrollable in this slum, a piece of Rwandan suburb, since the absurd death was ruling there, some unpleasant, of course, but now necessary measures were in order. From now on it was a question of prevention. The time of arrival



was announced. The train never started, but the rail-heads were appearing on the horizon.

We were as excited as fleas. At last, we'd be able to fight, to show them what we're made of, and to test ourselves in the field of political strategy. Flatten the right axe handle on the right helmet. It would not be the Grand Soire of our ancestors, but a little evening very much appreciated.

The riot squad appeared two days later at 6 a.m., when our dear Babylon was still asleep. The dogs howled with one throat, but they could not cover up the snoring coming from the cars. The poor panicked animals quickly took flight under the tear gas, which clouded the rising dawn. The Trotskyists on duty were not many that day, and, even if they showed undeniable courage trying to block all the doors, they didn't understand the tactic of the forces of order, which were more clever than usual. They didn't launch a frontal attack of the entrenched, but dazed camp. Instead, they savaged only the first car of the first train without going further, without climbing into the train to drag out its occupants with iron fists.

We quickly understood why.

An engine was coming, an old CC 7700, uncle told me, one of those which had broken, a long time ago, the speed record of 331 kilometers per hour at the same time as the BB 8800. I was rediscovering, little by little, my uncle's old passions, each one more surprising than the others. had realized, for example, that he was passionately interested in history, with a factual tendency, and that his favorite period was the beginning of the 17th Century,

which explained his continuous presence before, around Place des Vosges.

The machine slammed the train brutally, which destroyed all the sewer piping and burst the water lines. There were some sparks, the lights went off, some pipes dumped out their contents. Inside the train, there was a lot of hard yelling. The Holler Express. Then, protected by a triple rank of black helmets and shields, some technicians attached the engine



to the train. It started squealing, pulling away the ten cars behind it at low speed. Some people jumped from the moving train, falling into the stinking mud and the geyser of running water, but most of the occupants, screaming obscenities and insults out the windows, were dragged out of the sorting yard.

In the near-silence, which was due to astonishment and surprise, the newly-besieged watched the departure of this ghostly sort of train, rustling in the early morning twilight, this Breugel painting on wheels, until it disappeared at the end of the tracks.

by the huge incinerator, and announced to us that the whole neighborhood had been sealed off, from Austerlitz to Ivry, and that we could only count on our own meager forces. Reinforcement would never come. Waiting for the cavalry was not an option. Eyes were already red, but sparkling. Bandannas concealed faces, cases of Molotov cocktails appeared as though by magic, and different tactics were adopted. The anarchists regrouped in and around the last two trains, thinking the cops would attack from all sides. The rest of the troops dispersed with



## Chapter 7

And the fight started up again at a pace. The riot squad retreated in good order, under a rain of various projectiles, and after a ten-minute break they attacked the first car of the next train, because another engine was approaching at low speed.

"They could have at least sent us a 2D2!" Uncle laughed.<sup>6</sup>

Some people tried to lay down on the tracks but were cleared off by the law, feet first.

Three frenzied guys arrived from the other side, having passed

the objective of delaying the mopping-up of the trains as much as possible, until the friends, concerned parties, comrades, and maybe even the Parisian populace intervened, combining by way of an enormous demonstration to defend the wretched of the rails.

Uncle was ecstatic. It reminded him of '68, he said.

"Oh, right. Like you were there in 1968? At forty years old?" I threw at him, sure that I would learn things by pushing him onto this slippery ground. Back then he was the manager of an insurance company, so I could hardly imagine him manning



the barricades.

"You weren't even born, you little squirt, so what do you know?"

"My father never told me about this."

"That moron? All he did in '68 was debate at the Odeon. For him to have been there and to have put out his bullshit gives him the right to say he took part in the revolution. Myself, I didn't participate in the revolution. I didn't know a thing about the revolution. All I know is that on the 24th, I was on the street in my business suit."

"No kidding..."

"Yep! Just wear a tie for thirty years, and you'll see that you won't want to wash your feet either. I didn't know what to do. All these young people were giving me funny looks. Maybe they thought I was an undercover dick. In any case, I told myself 'I have to leave my mark; leave my signature.' At the corner of Boulevard du Maine and the rue Froidevaux there was some construction work: a little mess with fences and a backhoe. I climbed in, started it up. They're no harder to drive than a car. It took me 15 minutes to flatten one of those disgusting public urinals, built up against a wall. After that, I left. Everybody was laughing. I came by a month later. The urinal was still there, like some sort of iron sandwich. Hey, buddy, at least my signature was there for a month!"

Uncle was right. I didn't know what to say.

And the trench war began, train after train, with an incessant victory for the forces of order and the reaction. The always-well-to-

do were defeating the newly-poor, skirmish by skirmish, ambush by ambush, charge by charge. The riot squad was taking heavy losses, but it advanced, inevitably. Gasoline bottles were exploding in their faces, and they were answering with tear-gas grenades, fired point-blank. The paupers were dropping to their bellies in the compartments, leaving the struggle to the outside combatants. In the corridors, a few of them did take part in the fight. Some, sensing deep inside that they had nothing to lose, were charging straight ahead and hurling themselves, screaming into the big, hairy arms of the forces of order. The most energetic of the combatants were dragged away, clubbed, thrown into trucks, and taken away for another beating elsewhere. We learned over the radio, thanks to the two or three squawk-boxes that were still crackling away, that all around the battlefield, everything was calm. No demonstration on the horizon. No journalists were invited to the party, so they made do from the windows of apartments at a distance, to follow the carnage like Fabrice at Waterloo.<sup>7</sup> There was one who saw the battle from so far away that everything he said was bullshit, talking about "hundreds of injured," "the war in Paris," and "Sarajevo at our gates."

Another, more serious guy managed to get closer to the theater of operations, but he was severely trounced.

"The Press is in danger!" he screamed. He kept yelling, "free speech is being murdered!" We were alone, as on a stage, with very few spectators. It was a clean-handed operation.

# THE WRETCHED OF THE RAILS

On the other hand, free speech had not yet been murdered for us. The insults, filthy names, and other rhetorical devices were pouring down like rain. I learned a lot of new words. The tramps had one hell of a vocabulary, and they tried it out in a coughing, spitting barrage. I didn't know that a cop could be fucked up in so many different ways.

We also learned that the trains, conquered by the Law and the State, were taken a bit farther away, between Vitry and Choisy, and that the passengers were turned over to the regular cops there, who in turn brought them to Nanterre, where other despicable sortings-out were performed, and the ones who were willing to clear out on their own were left in peace without too much violence. The carrot and the stick. The meaning of life.<sup>8</sup>

As a result, many of the "protégés" showed reluctance. They wanted to surrender. They were scared. Since they'd be set free farther away, they preferred to go right away, rather than living through another hell. Some of them even started to insult us, saying that it was all our fault; that they didn't want anything but to be left alone, and that little squirts like us, with our big words, weren't going to tell them what to do. Many avoided the persuasive guardianship of the anarchists. For them, cheap wine in some other place would still be cheap wine.

Uncle himself was holding on just fine. He was having fun, feeling like a kid again, rediscovering his youth: Aah, '36': the demonstrations in rope sandals, the shoulder-bags full of nuts and bolts, the flatfoots who

high-tailed it out of there. Aah, '68: the trees felled along the boulevards, and the enormous, flooded hole at the intersection of Boulevards Sainte-Germain and Saint-Michel. In our train—that of the smelly ones—there was a wonderful ambiance, a death-to-the-pigs tendency, after the hasty withdrawal of the less-concerned and the least healthy. Wine is wine, and makes you warm when you piss it. Some of them had started the battle by hitting the bottle, and the events must have looked to them like the unreal decor of a nightmare, or of a party that ended in a fight. Some others were angry at the whole world. No mercy. Liberty or death. Fuck those assholes. No gods, no masters. Anarchy rules. Jail the Rich, send the teachers to the beach.

But for everyone it was a glorious day, a redemption. Silent Night, Drunken Night. We'll probably be the last ones to fall, but we'll keep on fighting till the end; until death; until we quench our thirst.

## Chapter 8

Time was marked by the waves of attack. It was going pretty quickly, not more than 15 minutes per train. The homeless were not crack troops. Drunk, sick, blinded by the tear gas, drained of strength, they were getting picked off, just like in 1914. The young leftists were learning quickly, but they were too few in number and hampered in their movements by the haphazard and disorderly comings-and-goings of these panicked paupers. The riot squad was throwing them into paddy wagons left and right. Some of them even discarded their shields—too cumbersome—and were clearing out the areas



around the cars with their billy-clubs. They even ventured to do some sorting: the young ones on one side, thrown into trucks, bound for jail; the old ones pushed back into the trains by force.

The trains were starting with quick, squeaking noises and were becoming less wild and vocal. The last one we saw leaving had a downright shameful silence to it.

"Destination, Auschwitz," Uncle mumbled through his rotted teeth. "These Nazis won't get me."

By morning's end, eight of the trains had been cleared out, and the terrain had become a total wasteland: a mixture of rails, mud, shit, and garbage. It was not a very cheerful sight, under the thick clouds of gas. Within a few hours, we had gone from Bruegel to Hieronymous Bosch. Hundreds of flashing lights on the cop cars and ambulances were piercing the fog, cutting the almost monolithic silhouette of the riot squad and gendarmes' army, withdrawn before the attack on the ninth train.

I myself was excited, eyes red, exhausted by incessant trips back and forth, trying to persuade the wine-sodden wrecks to organize themselves for the final clash.

Our car was ready. A real mobilization. Some were laying down under the seats. The doors were blocked by miniature barricades made of stacked objects. Each window was manned by the same number of warriors. The supply of projectiles had been distributed.

A quarrel had divided the defenders of our castle. Some

had suggested that we detach all the cars. That way the invaders would have to do battle at least ten times, the engine taking away only one car at a time. Others thought the fight would continue in another place, and that we should stick together.

Negotiations took place, and we cut the train in two. There would be two battles instead of one for the attackers, and each train of five cars was still an army on the march.

## Chapter 9

The battle for the ninth train was really Dante-esque. I was able to see up close, aided by fatigue and high stress, that the violence was becoming very real. The combatants were carried away, often covered in blood, by riot police who had become pit-bulls without leashes. The last organized leftists lost their bet in a gallant manner. They knocked out some members of the enemy



forces with the energy of their despair. All that, right in front of our eyes. The tramps on my train were terrorized: they almost weren't howling anymore. Arms dangling, wild hair, starting to drink again, to forget. It was like they were waiting for death.

Me, too. I was living a bizarre sensation: inevitability. We were going to have our faces smashed in. And this certain fact, instead of scaring me, gave me extraordinary strength and energy. I'd never felt like that. There were no more questions to ask ourselves. We had already lost. This prevented the anguish; suppressed the fear of physical pain. I thought about all those army stories, such as *Camarone*<sup>9</sup> or the Alamo, about all those cornered guys who seemed no longer to fear anything. It was as though the sure defeat was giving birth to invincibility and a certain kind of courage. In my suburban fights I had learned that only the first blow is painful, and after that you don't feel anything. You defend yourself, that's all.

When the ninth train started, we saw that many members of the forces of order were on board, blocking the doors. The ride was going to be tough. Some other guys escaped from our car through the windows, and they ran away wobbling, absolutely not wanting to face this kind of possibility. As for myself, I was staring to tremble, unable to stop. Our turn had arrived. It was like at the dentist's. As long as there were three people in front of you, it's O.K., but after that it's scary, and you watch the door. I finally realized that I'd like to go away for a long time, because there was nothing left to do but get one's face beaten in or getting shipped

off, as though this were a fucking death-train, waiting for the big wash-down, ten kilometers away. This idea was becoming impossible. The fight without any hope of victory is no longer a fight: it's a suicide. The tramps were moaning, and I saw one crying. Only a few loud ones were rediscovering their youth, with Uncle in the lead: about fifteen anarchists were holding the train, disheveled and excited like birds of prey. But we were not enough any more. The police fury was about to sweep over us. A guy next to me seemed to read my mind. A tall fellow, taking on a romantic, disabused attitude, but not hiding the dryness of the complicated tattoos covering his forearms. He was tearing his clothes apart on purpose, rubbing them on the ground to make them filthy, and he was smearing his face.

"Don't fall apart," he told me, "If you split now, if you surrender, they'll have time to study who you are, where you come from. They'll have all the chances they need to get at you. In the heat of the battle, you can blend in. It's your problem to work out. Personally, I just can't get nabbed. I'm a draft dodger for four years now, and I walked myself into this stupid trap. I'm going to fight, but at the last moment I'll try to be rounded up with the tramps. It may work. I have to believe in it. Otherwise, I'll find myself in a disciplinary unit in Bosnia right away.

"There's only volunteers over there..."

"You—you believe everything they tell you?" He looked at me as if I was a young novice from a convent. "As soon as things are



getting hot, you play dead, as if you're unconscious. They'll beat you a little less violently. With a little luck you'll get an ambulance ride. It's always better than the paddy wagon."

He was bugging me with his veteran's advice, this draft-dodger, but at the same time I must admit, I had to admire his courage. I realized that there were plenty of people, roughly my age, who were living a different life than mine, more thrilling, dangerous, unpredictable—all this in our beautiful society, apparently so tranquil and comfortable.

We watched the riot squad in a stuffy silence, withdrawing to recuperate some strength, to reorganize themselves, to reload their weapons and their batteries. I thought about all those movies with the same cliché scene: entrenched before the assault, behind the wagons, before the Apaches arrive, in the belly of a plane before the big jump, with all those idiotic dialogs that everyone knows by heart:

"If you manage to survive, go find my wife, and tell her that I died bravely..."

"If I get out of here somehow, I'll spend a week at the Negresco, down on the Riviera..."

And all those stupid lines. And the photo of the child that he looks at; the love letter that he dreamily smells. In short:

There was an incredible tension in the air. Like before an injection of sodium pentothal. Before a major punch in the nose.

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**Look for the next installment of *Wretched of the Rails* in the Spring 2004 issue of Arsenal.**

## Footnotes

- <sup>4</sup> A reference to Drancy, the Paris suburb which was used as the main sorting terminal for French Jews and politicals being deported to Nazi concentration camps during WWII.
- <sup>5</sup> May 22nd is the anniversary of the May 1968 student revolt.
- <sup>6</sup> A 2D2 is a relatively "classy" train engine.
- <sup>7</sup> A reference to the novel *The Charterhouse of Parma* by Stendahl (1839)
- <sup>8</sup> There is a facility at Nanterre, to which homeless people are brought (often against their will) to be examined by a doctor, washed, and deloused.
- <sup>9</sup> On April 30, 1863, during the French-Mexican War, sixty-four legionnaires resisted 2000 Mexicans at a farm named Camarone. All but three of the Frenchmen were killed.



# KNOWN UNKNOWNNS THEATER OOBLECK



Postcard for Known Unknowns, illustration by Friese Undine

by Jonathan Rochkind

Theater Oobleck is a Chicago-based director-less theater collective that's been around almost twenty years. Their stylistic toolbox includes Brechtian absurdity, clowning, slapstick, puppetry, and just plain good acting and clever writing—often all in the same work at once. Sometimes more overtly political, sometimes less, but always a theater of ideas which successfully avoids pretension, and is often hilarious. And if all that weren't enough, their productions are usually affordably priced under \$10, and "free if yer broke".

Their latest production ran in May, and collected six short works all addressing in some way the "war on terrorism" at home and abroad. The first piece, *Known Unknowns*, which lent its name to the production as whole, was a frenetic satire full of slapstick and wordplay. Of the works

in this production, it was the most similar to some of my favorite past Oobleck productions. Kind of a 'twenty minutes into the future' look at a future US police state based on the current government's disdain for 'due process' at home and its love of ridiculous logic as apology for military intervention abroad. The well acted, very funny sketch paints the US government as both entirely absurd and horribly frightening.

Things just got darker from there. The piece I liked best, called "Have You Got Yourself an Occupation", was centered around a wonderfully strange device holding five or six differently sized rolls of brown paper, criss-crossing each other. As operators behind the machine turned cranks to scroll the paper, different charcoal drawings rolled into view. Often the drawings on the rolls would align to form a single large scene—just watching the contraption in action provided its own delight, and the naturalistic charcoal drawings were well done. The images rolling by illustrated a narration in two parts. The first was an account of the US bombing of the 'Road to Basra' during the first Persian Gulf War. In this horrifying but mostly unknown military incident toward the tail end of that official war, US air and ground forces massacred tens (or hundreds?) of thousands of Iraqi soldiers and not-soldiers attempting to flee Kuwait toward the Iraqi city of Basra. Even less well known, and not even mentioned in the narrative, is that Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh drove a US Army armored truck along the road after the massacre, bulldozing over dead, wounded and hiding Iraqis. He wrote an anguished letter home to his aunt after the incident: "We did a lot of terrible things in Iraq. Killing Iraqis

Known Unknowns  
Review



was hard at first, but the more we killed the easier it got." McVeigh's first involvement in mass murder was reluctant, and at the orders of military superiors.

The second part of the narration was a reading of British Lieutenant-General Stanley Maude's 1917 "Proclamation to the People of the Wilayat of Baghdad", delivered at the beginning of that British occupation of Iraq. Except for a very few phrases providing historical context, the exact text could have come straight from the mouth of some American or British stooge in yesterday's newspaper. Which was exactly the point, as images of both early 20th and early 21st century imperialists scrolled before the audience.

For the final piece, "Scythian Sky Poetry: Oral Epics of Nephology", the audience was invited to lie on the floor to look up at cloud-like images projected on the ceiling, as a narrator read myths, fables and stories translated from ancient Scythian texts. The stories were enjoyable in a relaxing make-believe sort of way, but the real punch came with the last line of the narration, which informed us that the remainder of the story had not yet been translated, but we could hope the translator would complete her work on the original texts, stored in the Iraqi National Library. A soft but convincing argument that the loss of cultural history in war is worth mourning too.

I hope Theater Oobleck continues to provide Chicago with a lot more original, affordable, thought-provoking entertainment.

## THOSE WITHOUT A COUNTRY: THE POLITICAL CULTURE OF ITALIAN AMERICAN SYNDICALISTS

Michael Miller Topp  
University of Minnesota  
Press, 2001

by Jonathan Rochkind

This is an account of the Italian-American Syndicalist organization Federazione Socialista Italiana, and those involved with it, during the first several decades of the 20th century, from an academic "Immigration History" perspective.

Maybe this topic just didn't interest me as much as I thought it would. Or maybe I found the writing to be generally poor. This book originated as a graduate dissertation, and it shows. Theses are again and again restated in only slightly different words; facts and quotations from the historical record are marshalled somewhat haphazardly to 'prove' the desired points, sometimes more successfully than others. I would have appreciated more political analysis and less repetition of facts, but maybe I just don't appreciate how History (with a capital H) is written.

Topp's theses are actually quite thought provoking, which makes it only more disappointing that more light is not brought to them. One is that male-supremacist ideas, revealed by gendered and misogynistic language, were strongly present in the Italian syndicalist movement—an overwhelmingly male movement, even when compared to other anarchists and radicals of the time. Another is that living in the US brought these stridently

internationalist syndicalists to recognize a fundamental connection to Italy, and "Italian" as a fundamental part of their identity. They had mixed success fitting this (sometimes not entirely conscious) recognition into their anti-nationalist revolutionary ideology.

I found the book most interesting when it addressed the FSI members' place within the larger Italian Left, and the divisive disputes within this Left which foreshadowed the rise of fascism. Maybe it's not the fault of this book that reading it made me realize I'm really looking for a different book: the story of how, why, and to what degree Mussolini's fascism found its genesis within the Italian Left, especially the syndicalist movement. That's not meant to be the focus of this book, but there are tantalizing hints. In recounting a factional dispute involving three Italian-Americans—Di Silvestro, a former syndicalist who had "by this point abandoned his radical roots"; Rossoni, a syndicalist member of the FSI; and Tancredi "neither a syndicalist nor an FSI member—he was an anarchist"—Topp concludes the account with: "By the time Italian American radicals battled against Mussolini and fascism, not only Di Silvestro, but Rossoni and Tancredi, as well, would be fascists." To be sure, many syndicalists, anarchists and other Italian leftists fought fascism, often at great personal price. But many others formed the core of Mussolini's movement. I'm still keeping my eye out for a well-written book on the Italian Syndicalist movement, the rise of Italian fascism, and the relationship between these two.



## WAR TALK

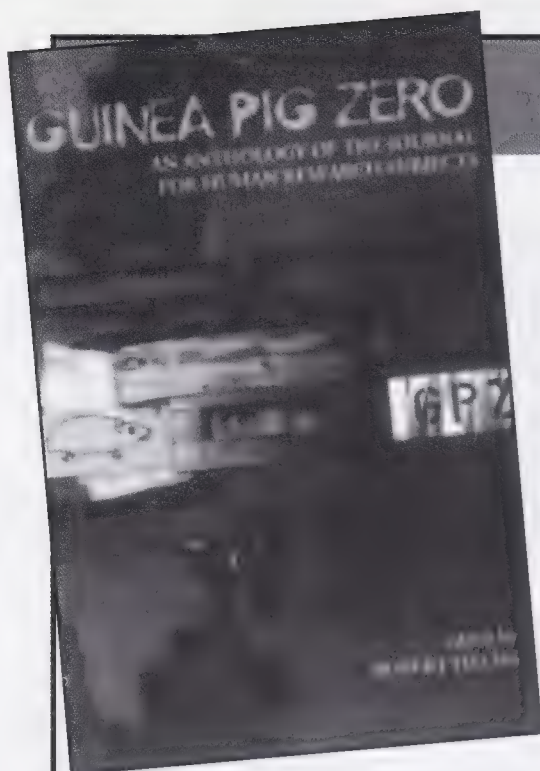
**Arundhati Roy**  
**South End Press, 2003**  
 by Jonathan Rochkind

Indian author Arundhati Roy is widely known as the author of the popular novel *The God of Small Things*, but she's also a committed activist and essayist on issues of peace, global capitalism, democracy, and human rights.

This recent book of political essays contains some good stuff, but is disappointingly brief. Twelve dollars gets you just 112 wide-margined double-spaced pages consisting of six essays on the current global order, and sometimes India's role in it. Some of the essays are more enlightening than others, but all are informed by a clear-headed anti-authoritarian and anti-nationalist perspective that makes me curious why Roy doesn't publicly identify as an anarchist, and whether she does privately.

The most important essay included is *Democracy: Who Is She When She Is At Home?*, an account of the rising tide of Hindu fascism in India, previously published in a shorter version in *The Nation*, among other places, as *Fascism's Firm Footprint in India*. Roy isn't using 'fascism' as an all purpose epithet for oppressive government policies or disagreeable ideologies. Her understanding of fascism is consistent with the thinking of other contemporary left-oriented thinkers whom I respect, as a reactionary ultra-nationalist male-supremacist mass movement which employs organized mass violence. This essay is a must-read for anyone who sees fascism as a serious global threat in the 21st century. I hope Roy continues to address this topic in more depth.





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# THE ONTARIO COALITION AGAINST POVERTY



by Jeff Shantz

The Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) was founded in the fall of 1990 after several groups came together to mobilize against proposed cuts to welfare rates by the then-ruling Liberal government. From the beginning OCAP was dedicated to militant direct action rather than consultation and compromise. We have never been primarily an advocacy group, acting on behalf of others. Our actions are determined by the real needs of our members and we take a course of action where we do whatever it takes to meet those needs. OCAP is a poor people's movement and we organize among the diverse members of the working class rather than trying to reach out to small business people or middle-class liberals. We do not organize as a broad but meaningless coalition. OCAP has never been interested in being a party-building or vanguard organization. We are a participatory "rank-and-file" organization of poor people who meet to decide what our needs are, how we can meet them, and how we can organize the sort of movement that will effectively

challenge capitalist regimes. Decisions are made by the membership as a whole at bi-weekly general membership meetings. Lively discussions of issues and debates over strategies and tactics occur before votes are taken. Because much of the work we do has immediate implications, we have to avoid getting bogged down in interminable consensus processes. Decisions are made by majority votes, but because of the detailed debates and time given to discussion consensus is usually achieved. While OCAP has an elected "executive," its role is to provide some continuity between meetings. The general membership is the highest decision-making body and executive meetings are open to all members to take part. At present OCAP is based primarily in Toronto, although there are groups in Sudbury and that Kitchener-Waterloo have expressed interest in becoming regional affiliates. Groups in Ottawa, Belleville, and Peterborough may at some point become part of an OCAP network. We have a longstanding relationship with Mohawks of Tyendinaga and have worked in solidarity with First Nations in Akwesasne, Six Nations, and in the northern community of Pikangikum. OCAP has drawn much inspiration and learned many tactical lessons from the Mohawk Warriors and their principled and uncompromising struggles against the Canadian state's racist colonial practices.



## Direct Action Gets The Goods

OCAP's principles are DIY and our collective power of disruption is used both to defend individuals and families and to challenge broader political practices. This allows us to win real victories in the here and now while also advancing the struggles necessary to bring this rotten system down. Right now, direct action at the point of oppression is the most effective means we have to oppose hostile conditions. As a tactic of self-defence OCAP has developed "direct action casework." This involves bringing large numbers of members and allies directly to an offending agency, landlord, or workplace and staying until we get what we came for. If an acceptable settlement is not forthcoming we raise the costs of offending agencies to the point where it is no longer worthwhile for them to act in an oppressive way. Direct action casework has brought victories in attaining social benefits, fighting evictions, stopping deportations, and winning back pay.

These methods of collective direct action are also applied to broader struggles. Often this means directly targeting businesses. When a Hollywood movie production drove sex workers from a downtown street without compensation (which had been given to small businesses for lost earnings during the shoot) we disrupted filming with a contingent of people. The next day an envelope full of bills arrived at our office for the workers. When a restaurant owner successfully lobbied to close a downtown shelter we ran

an ongoing picket at his business until he asked the City to reopen the shelter.

In 1997 OCAP acted against the vicious situation in which hundreds of empty apartment buildings in Toronto were boarded over by speculators looking to drive up property values or rents on other properties. OCAP marched over 300 people to 2 abandoned buildings to open them up as housing for homeless people. Police used horses to keep people out and laid a variety of charges against participants. A year later, the buildings were opened as social housing. In 1999, we took over an empty former hospital that local yuppie residents and businesses were trying to keep from being turned into a shelter. While we were forcibly evicted by the Emergency Task Force, plans for the shelter were put back on schedule.

During 1998's Active Resistance (AR) anarchist gathering the "Hands off Street Youth" march was jointly organized by AR, Anti-Racist Action and OCAP. We demanded that police and city officials immediately end their harassment of squeegeers. That summer OCAP began fighting squeegeeing tickets in court. We have effectively challenged the cops and provided a proper defence. OCAP has won every case that we have fought.

In August 1999 OCAP organized a several hundred strong occupation of Allan Gardens Park, an early site of racist-targeted policing where cops routinely cleared out homeless people or harassed people because of skin color or appearance. We established the park as a

communal "Safe Park." For three days the park was a beacon of mutual aid in practice; people lived together, fed, helped, and cared for each other.

During the summer of 2000 OCAP and allies from unions and community groups raised the level of resistance by several degrees. A summer of direct action kicked off on June 15 with a mass effort to address the Provincial Legislature, recognizing that the Provincial government has been at the forefront of attacks against poor people in Ontario. OCAP demanded that a delegation of poor people be allowed to address the legislature. The action ended in a full-scale police riot. Despite full speed baton charges by mounted riot police, it took over an hour for the cops to clear people from the grounds. Longtime officers claimed afterwards that they had never encountered such stiff resistance. The head of the riot squad infamously told reporters afterwards that it was as if the crowd "didn't feel the blows."

June 15 marked a significant turning point. First, it showed the entire province that we could stand up to the state's horrible force and fight. Second, the day brought radical activists together again as part of a broader and hopefully sustained mobilization against the local agents of global capital.

OCAP Allies was built by supporters in unions, universities, and high schools who came together to defend us when we were targeted by the state right after the June 15, 2000 police riot. Dozens of our members were arrested, and provisionally released on the condition that

they not associate with OCAP. This attempt to criminalize OCAP was a play by the government and their media mouthpieces to isolate us from broader segments of the left and the community. The Allies organized public meetings, fundraising, and bail in our defense, as well as providing a forum for organized labour to make social statements of support for the unemployed people who fought in that struggle.

In 2001 OCAP organized in cities, workplaces, towns and reserves throughout Ontario working towards a series of acts of political and economic disruption throughout Ontario and beyond. The Ontario Common Front (OCF) formed to build a network among like-minded organizations (unions, First Nations, other OCAP-style direct action groups) which would target significant corporate backers of the Tories, especially the major banks and real estate developers, in different parts of Ontario. September 11th scared the union leaders away and as a result the actions could not have the impact they would have had with union involvement. Among the notable actions around the province were a blockade of a major trucking route by Mohawks, and a snake march through the Bay Street area in Toronto (Canada's equivalent to Wall Street). The OCF still exists as a network of action groups in a number of Ontario cities and continues building OCAP-style work in cities such as Sudbury, Ottawa, Kingston and Belleville.

As an internationalist organization OCAP has also taken on a great deal of work in defence of immigrants and refugees. Along with allies in the Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 3903



Flying Squad OCAP has gone directly to Pearson International Airport to stop deportations. Leaflets are given to passengers, alerting them to the situation and visits are paid to the Immigration Canada deportation office in the basement of Terminal One. In one instance, OCAP successfully stopped three deportations, a testament to the powers of direct action, especially when backed by labour. OCAP has also built active alliances with anti-poverty and workers' organizations in other countries. During the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, OCAP responded to a call by our allies in the West Cape Tenants' Group by taking a picket to the offices of the South African Trade Consulate. A couple of weeks later, at the request of the Equality Trade Union of South Korea, OCAP held a picket against Korean Air in solidarity with migrant workers in Korea who were being attacked by the South Korean government. In this case, OCAP targeted the capitalists who support, direct, and benefit from government policies rather than the government itself.

Through our actions we learn that despite this system's best efforts to beat us down, we can actually enjoy some victories. We also learn that the authorities are not all-powerful or beyond our grasp. Actions teach us how bureaucracies work, that decisions are often arbitrary and based on nothing more than expediency or the hope that we'll accept "no" for an answer. Institutions that appear mysterious or impenetrable often come undone when confronted by a delegation of 10–20 people who are sure of their purpose.



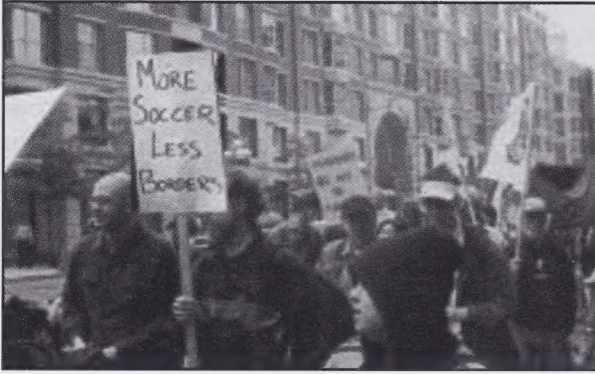
## Reform And Revolution?

Although we do press governments and bosses for resources that we need to sustain us and help us build our capacity to fight, OCAP is not a reformist group. OCAP is an explicitly, anti-capitalist organization. Along the way we have a responsibility to take care of each other, defend ourselves against bosses, landlords, cops, and courts. Since the state's and the bosses' resources are all stolen from the working class anyway, why shouldn't we take back all that we can get?

Many revolutionary groups show a detachment from the daily realities of large sectors of the working class, especially the poorest. If you can meet your rent every month and don't need rent controls; if you can get by after a layoff without unemployment insurance or welfare; if you've never needed to panhandle then good for you. But don't talk carelessly of "reformism."

OCAP agrees with Lorenzo Komboa Ervin's position that reforms are part of our survival pending the/a revolution. It's tough to fight for the revolution





when people are losing their homes or can't feed their children. Even small victories give people a sense that they can actually win. This breaks the demoralization and apathy and also gives us a taste for bigger victories.

Having said this, it is important to understand the place of reforms in longer term strategies and not limit our focus to reforms. OCAP does not pursue reform for reform's sake and we do not organize primarily to win more or better reforms. As stated above, we take whatever we can get to make our lives a little better and to give us the strength and momentum to keep fighting, but we never lose sight of the fact that things are only really going to get better if we get rid of capitalism and build something new. At the same time we have to realize that there is a tension between the reformist and anti-capitalist aspects of OCAP's work and must always work to ensure that the day-to-day "reformist" work not come to dominate our activities.

Some European social movements push wide-ranging and diverse demands on the state to make reforms that they know it cannot make. Revealing the state's limitations and playing on its inherent contradictions can press the state to potential crisis.

There is still much debate about this perspective and, while it makes some sense, it can only be a part of broader organizing work.

The failure to recognize the limits of reforms and to situate demands for reforms within a broader strategy is a problem that afflicts the labour movement in Canada. Many union leaders pin their hopes on an ideal of a re-vamped and rebuilt welfare state. They continue to offer compromises long after the other party has walked away from the table. For many union "leaders" there was nothing before the welfare state and workers only faced desperation. They forget that before the welfare state, unions were providing many of those very responsibilities within working class communities.

At the same time, we recognize that one of the areas where we've needed to do more work is in building dual power institutions that can meet our needs in the here-and-now without having to rely on claims against the state. These institutions would offer real alternatives and a self-determined base for developing our strength. At one time in the history of the labour movement, unions offered such a basis for providing medical clinics, elderly care, hostels, underground railroads and schools for workers. Today's unions neglect this work, leaving the state to provide these things for workers. This has done a great deal to undermine working class autonomy. In OCAP, our recent squatting efforts, notably the Pope Squat, are part of a turn towards building more permanent dual power institutions.

OCAP learned a long time ago that marches and rallies are



almost completely useless. Protest rituals and reliance on moral arguments confine struggles to the terrain of what the state and bosses find permissible and thus are ineffective for making real gains on our terms and in ways that meet our needs. Our members just don't have the time and means to come out for purely symbolic actions.

Recognizing that we have no interests or values in common with the economic and political bosses, we don't try to "reach them" on any level. Instead we attack them where it hurts—in their bank accounts. Part of that strategy means acting in ways that raise their costs of doing business. It also means refusing to accept any right they might claim to make the decisions that fundamentally affect us. We neither recognize nor respect government or corporate authority and see it plainly for what it is: an impediment to our self-determination and an attempt to monopolize social power in their own hands. We do whatever we can to make it impossible for the exploiters to implement and carry out their agenda.

As a relatively small organization of poor people, OCAP can only do so much. Broad and deep transformations on a decisive basis still require the real power that workers have in their workplaces to stop the wheels of the machine from turning. OCAP still has a lot of work to do in building links with workers and contributing to broadened rank-and-file militancy. Indeed, this is one of the areas where OCAP has its greatest difficulties. Whether or not OCAP is able to make gains in this work will say

a lot about its contributions to reformist or anti-capitalist struggles.

